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ABSTRACT

The Rural Opportunities Offer Tomorrow's Success (ROOTS) program is a series of policy initiatives which address problem areas in rural education, economic development, health care, and access to programs in Pennsylvania. Policy initiatives to create a better educated rural workforce include: (1) expanding career and financial counseling in rural school districts with low participation in higher education; (2) expanding teleteaching; and (3) developing recommendations for expanding 2-year degree offerings at rural educational institutions. Policy initiatives to help rural areas benefit from urban growth include: (1) training and supporting entrepreneurs of telelinked businesses; (2) encouraging residential-based economic development; and (3) expanding technical assistance to increase access of rural residents to existing housing programs. Policy initiatives to curtail present threats to the rural health care system include enrolling Pennsylvania in the National Health Service Corps State Loan Repayment Program and establishing special add-on Medicaid reimbursement funding for hospitals identified as critical rural health access points. Policy initiatives to increase rural access to state programs include: (1) forming an Intragovernmental Council for Program Coordination in rural areas; (2) analyzing legislation before it becomes law to determine its affect on rural citizens; (3) raising the current funding cap and expanding the current appropriation for the Community Facilities Program; (4) improving the utilization of university resources for rural development outreach; (5) encouraging the establishment of county economic development offices; and (6) providing financial incentives for local development districts to expand services to rural areas. (ALL)

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The ROOTS Program

Rural Opportunities Offer Tomorrow's Success

The ROOTS Program is a comprehensive package of critical legislative and executive initiatives that would build a better future for rural Pennsylvania.

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Developed by the
Center for Rural Pennsylvania
A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly
(717) 787-9555

RC018102

Program Summary

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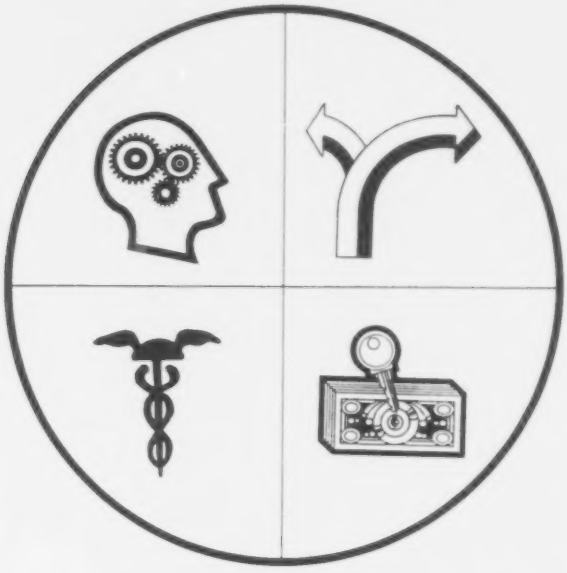
The **ROOTS** Program



Rural **O**pportunities **O**ffer **T**omorrow's **S**uccess

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Program Summary
January 1990

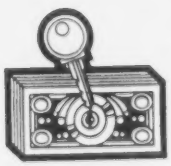
The **ROOTS** Program was developed by the **Center for Rural Pennsylvania.** (717) 787-9555

The Rural Center is a Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly that serves as a focal point for rural policy development. The Board of Directors include: Representative David R. Wright, Chairman; J. Dennis Murray, Vice Chairman; Senator Patrick J. Stapleton, Treasurer; Senator John E. Peterson, Secretary; Representative Samuel H. Smith; Robert N. Aebersold; Daryl K. Heasley; Lamartine F. Hood; C. Guy Rudy; Meyer Sonis; Christian F. Wolff, Jr. The Rural Center is located at 212 Locust Street, Suite 408, Harrisburg, PA 17101.

ROOTS

Rural **O**pportunities **O**ffer **T**omorrow's **S**uccess

ROOTS is a comprehensive package of critical legislative and executive initiatives that would build a better future for rural Pennsylvania.

Today's Opportunity	Tomorrow's Success
Create a better educated rural workforce	Rural workers will have skills necessary for tomorrow's jobs
Help rural areas benefit from urban growth	Restored vitality to rural economies
Curtail present threats to the rural health care system	Impending losses of rural health care will be prevented
 Increase rural access to state programs	Improved use of state resources for solving rural problems

The **ROOTS** Program
Rural **O**pportunities **O**ffer **T**omorrow's **S**uccess

What is it?

The ROOTS Program or "Rural Opportunities Offer Tomorrow's Success" is a series of policy initiatives that address problem areas in rural education, economic development, health care, and access to state programs. Suggested solutions, which take the form of both legislative and executive responses, offer ways that rural communities and their residents could fulfill their needs with the cooperation of state government. A cornerstone of the Roots Program is to build upon the many opportunities and programs already in place in rural areas.

Why is it needed?

Pennsylvania, with 3.6 million rural residents, has the largest rural population of any state in the nation. Most Pennsylvanians have their roots in small rural communities. Over the past year, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania has taken a close look at those roots, which have traditionally served as the backbone of the Commonwealth's economy.

More than 250 representatives from rural organizations, researchers, local officials, and private citizens from across the Commonwealth provided their ideas on rural conditions and needed actions. They served on working groups of rural experts, testified at public hearings, and participated at other public forums sponsored by the Rural Center.

Drawing on this broad base of input, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania identified specific opportunities for rural improvement that are the basis for the ROOTS Program. The program represents opportunities for state government supported actions which can make a difference for rural communities and their residents. ***With appropriate legislative and executive actions today, rural areas have the opportunity to be full partners with their urban neighbors in realizing the benefits of future economic growth and vitality. Without state actions, opportunities for rural renewal will remain unfulfilled.***

How do we get there?

The Commonwealth's rural roots must be cultivated in order to ensure their strength and vitality in the years to come. The program described here provides that cultivation. ***By putting into action the following policy initiatives, Pennsylvania will take advantage of today's rural opportunities to build a better rural future for tomorrow.***

OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE A BETTER EDUCATED RURAL WORKFORCE

Creating a better educated rural workforce today will prepare rural workers with the skills necessary for tomorrow's jobs.

The key to the jobs of the future is education. Over 50 percent of the jobs created during the 1990s will require some education beyond high school. Jobs of the future will demand higher skill levels, but rural people lag behind in participation in programs that provide needed skills.

Three Opportunities To Create A Better Educated Rural Workforce

- *break the cycle of low participation rates for higher education in rural areas*
- *bring the specialized courses needed for tomorrow's economy to rural schools and businesses*
- *expand the availability of two-year college degree programs in rural areas*

OPPORTUNITY: ***Break the cycle of low participation rates in higher education in rural areas.***

Low rural participation in higher education is rooted in history. Less than 28 percent of rural parents have had any postsecondary educational experiences while 47 percent of urban

students come from families where at least one parent has continued education beyond high school. Parents who have continued past high school are much more likely to encourage their sons and daughters to pursue higher educational attainment. Research has identified that the single most influential factor in whether a student will attend postsecondary education is the attitude of his/her parents toward education. In order to break the cycle of non-participation in higher education, programs must be initiated which focus on parental attitudes toward education in rural areas.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Expand career and financial counseling for families within rural school districts with low participation in higher education.*

Pilot programs conducted by the Project for An Informed Choice are proving successful in helping students and parents consider postsecondary education and career options at the junior high school/middle school level. The ROOTS Program includes a proposal to implement a statewide program targeted to rural school districts where students have low participation rates. The program will emphasize intense interaction with students' parents to help them learn about the benefits of and financing options for higher education. The programs will also provide students with necessary education and guidance to encourage them to prepare for higher education.

OPPORTUNITY: *Bring the specialized courses needed for tomorrow's economy to rural schools and businesses.*

Tomorrow's economy will require that schools bring specialized and advanced courses to their students. Students will need skills in higher level math, science, and advanced technology. For schools with small student populations, hiring specialized teachers may be prohibitively expensive. The expanding field of telecommunications offers potential to bring a broad range of courses into rural schools, but has largely been untapped in rural Pennsylvania.

There are a number of options for using telecommunications to bring more courses into rural schools. For example, satellites could bring audio and interactive visual programs into schools. But this technology is still beyond the financial resources of many schools.

Until some of the more advanced technology solutions become more feasible for rural schools, low tech solutions are a better option. With a computer modem and two telephone lines, students in an isolated rural school can hear the voice and respond to questions from a calculus teacher who might be in the next county. The computer and modem are used as an interactive chalkboard, where the teacher can display visuals or problems and where rural students can write answers for instant review by their faraway teacher. Applications of the same technology can be utilized to provide low-cost customized training for workers in isolated rural businesses.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Expand teleteaching within rural Pennsylvania.*

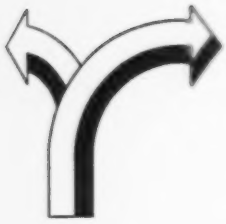
As a part of the ROOTS Program, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania will pursue legislative authority to develop and implement a statewide program expanding the utilization of teleteaching by rural schools and businesses. The program would build upon pilot teleteaching efforts currently funded with discretionary funds from the Department of Education. Necessary components of the program include analyzing the most appropriate method of teleteaching for different schools and businesses and coordinating efforts with emerging telecommunication networks. Special emphasis would be given to low tech options such as the delivery of educational programs through computers and phone lines.

OPPORTUNITY: *Expand the availability of two-year college degree programs in rural areas.*

Two-year degree programs play an important role in providing residents with necessary skills to support rural development. Two-year programs are particularly important for individuals already in the workforce desiring to upgrade their skills or change occupations. The need for vocational and professional improvement opportunities is expanding due to the rapidly changing nature of today's economy. Unfortunately, two-year degree programs are less available in rural areas than urban places.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Develop recommendations for expanding two-year degree offerings at educational institutions currently serving rural areas.*

Pennsylvania has in place an extensive network of higher education institutions throughout the rural Commonwealth. While these institutions do offer some two-year and associate degree programs, the emphasis is on four-year degrees. Through its ongoing research program, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania will assess the current access of rural Pennsylvanians to two-year degree programs, identify two-year degree programs most needed by rural residents, and develop recommendations for improving access to such programs.



OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP RURAL AREAS BENEFIT FROM URBAN GROWTH

Helping rural areas benefit from urban growth today will lead to restored vitality for rural economies tomorrow.

More Pennsylvanians are employed today than at any other time in history. Over the past two years, the dramatic declines in the state's manufacturing employment have slowed and turned in a positive direction. Unemployment is at its lowest level in 15 years. The Pennsylvania economy appears to have turned the corner and is poised for continued growth in the next decade.

Unfortunately, many rural Pennsylvanians are being left behind and have not participated in this new prosperity. Unemployment levels in virtually all of Pennsylvania's rural labor markets remain higher than the statewide average. While some rural areas, particularly in the eastern half of the state are doing well, the economic gap between the average rural Pennsylvanian and his urban neighbor continues to grow.

A key to ensuring that rural areas do not continue to lag behind is to connect rural economies to the growing prosperity in other areas of the state. The ROOTS Program includes three specific opportunities to ensure that the rural economy does not continue to fall behind that of urban areas.

Three Opportunities to Help Rural Areas Benefit From Urban Growth

- *develop rural telelinked businesses that serve urban clients*
- *support development that will capture dollars in the rural communities where many urban workers live*
- *stop returning millions of rural housing dollars allocated for Pennsylvania back to the federal government*

OPPORTUNITY: ***Encourage the development of telelinked rural businesses that serve urban clients.***

Urban areas are experiencing critical shortages of clerical and data processing assistance. In the face of labor shortages, some urban businesses have used telecommunications to allow urban work to be completed in rural areas. However, many of these jobs have not found their way to rural Pennsylvania. For example, one employer in Philadelphia recently contracted with a data processing company in Ireland to meet clerical needs. Four hundred jobs went to Ireland that could have gone to rural Pennsylvania.

There is a great deal of potential to use technology to bring jobs to the rural Commonwealth. Telelinked businesses can mean more than clerical positions. Opportunities exist for rural accountants, business consultants and others to serve urban clients.

POLICY INITIATIVE: ***Train and support entrepreneurs of telelinked businesses in rural Pennsylvania.***

As a part of its ongoing activities, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania will work cooperatively with private telephone companies and higher education institutions to develop a pilot project demonstrating the potential of telelinked businesses. The Pennsylvania ROOTS Program would extend this initial pilot effort to develop a statewide program providing skills and technical expertise to rural entrepreneurs needed to begin the widespread development of telelinked businesses within rural Pennsylvania.

OPPORTUNITY: ***Support development that will capture dollars in the rural communities where many urban workers live.***

Many rural communities are too small to support significant job development. Fortunately, many of these smaller communities live within reasonable commuting distance of larger employment hubs. Many small communities offer great potential of attracting residents who work in the more urbanized centers. However, attracting residents will not make a significant impact on the vitality of rural communities unless the new income is captured in rural areas.

POLICY INITIATIVE: ***Encourage residential-based economic development in smaller rural communities building on the economic growth in nearby employment centers.***

The first goal of residential-based development is to attract more residents by improving the "livability" of the community through improved housing, services, and access to the larger employment/service center. The second goal is to capture the new income brought into the community. Improving the viability of main street businesses is an example of one specific action which can be taken. The ROOTS Program would provide for the collection of necessary data to formulate regional rural economic development strategies including residential-based development in smaller communities. Future initiatives will focus on the implementation of these strategies.

OPPORTUNITY: ***Stop returning millions of rural housing dollars allocated for Pennsylvania back to the federal government.***

Access to affordable housing is critical to the ability of rural communities to attract new residents and retain current community members. A number of federal and state housing programs are available to assist rural communities facing shortages. Unfortunately, these programs are underutilized in rural areas. Particularly disturbing is that millions of dollars of Farmers Home Administration monies targeted for rural housing in Pennsylvania are returned to the federal government every year. These rural monies are needed by Pennsylvania's communities.

PRIORITY INITIATIVE: ***Expand technical assistance to increase the access of rural residents to existing housing programs.***

Housing counselors in Pennsylvania have demonstrated that additional funds from existing housing programs can be retained in the state through the outreach efforts involving the promotion of existing programs and assistance in completing applications. The ROOTS Program includes a statewide initiative that would encompass these same elements and be targeted toward areas with the highest unused portions of Farmers Home Administration monies. A similar program of outreach and application assistance implemented in New York brought 11 federal dollars in for every 1 dollar invested in housing counselors.

OPPORTUNITIES TO CURTAIL PRESENT THREATS TO THE RURAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Curtailing present threats to the rural health care system today will prevent the loss of critical rural health care tomorrow.

The availability of health care within reasonable geographic proximity is important to all of us. It plays a critical role in personal well-being. Health care is also important to the economy because it affects the location decisions of businesses and new residents. In the past decade, health services were the fastest growing sector of the Pennsylvania economy.

A number of recent trends are affecting the ability of rural people to access health locally. Shortages of health professionals and the closing of rural hospitals are particularly disturbing.

Two Opportunities To Curtail Present Threats To The Rural Health Care System

- *minimize the loss of rural doctors that will result from the dismantling of the National Health Service Scholarship Program and other recent events*
- *ensure that rural areas do not lose their community hospitals*

OPPORTUNITY: ***Minimize the loss of rural doctors and nurses that will result from the dismantling of the National Health Service Scholarship Program (NHS) and other recent events.***

The federal government discontinued the National Health Service Scholarship Program which had provided a pool of physicians for underserved rural areas by furnishing grants to medical students in return for service. Even while the NHS Program was in operation, small rural communities had a physician-to-population ratio of less than one-third the national ratio. The shortage of physicians in rural Pennsylvania will intensify over the 1990s as current obligated services under NHS are completed and communities are left without a pool of physicians from which to draw. Other trends affecting rural doctor shortages are low physician reimbursements for Medicaid, changes in doctor training, and the increasing technological demands of health care. Shortages of nurses are also critical in rural areas.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Enroll Pennsylvania in the National Health Service Corps State Loan Repayment Program.*

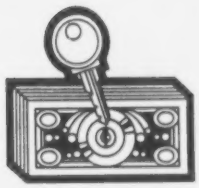
To meet growing health care shortages in rural Pennsylvania, the ROOTS Program includes an initiative to enroll Pennsylvania in the National Health Service Corps State Loan Repayment Program. The program repays student loans for doctors and nurses practicing in underserved rural areas. Up to 75 percent of the program costs would be paid by the federal government.

OPPORTUNITY: *Ensure that rural areas do not lose their community hospitals.*

Because rural hospitals serve as emergency centers, primary care centers, and backup for local physicians, they represent a critical link in the rural health care system. A number of rural hospitals in Pennsylvania are reported to be on the brink of closure. Hospital administrators have reported that inequitable Medicaid and Medicare repayments for rural hospitals are the primary cause of the current financial difficulties of hospitals in rural areas.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Establish special add-on Medicaid reimbursement funding for hospitals identified as critical health access points for rural citizens.*

This initiative focuses on the state administered Medicaid program. To implement the initiative, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania would identify hospitals that are the most critical access points for health care for rural citizens. Hospitals identified as critical access facilities that are financially unstable would be eligible for a higher percentage of Medicaid reimbursements to help insure that these institutions remain financially viable.



OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE RURAL ACCESS TO STATE PROGRAMS

Increasing rural access to state programs today would improve use of state resources for solving rural problems tomorrow.

Many state programs directly impact rural development. Examples include programs administered by the Pennsylvania Departments of Commerce, Education, Labor and Industry, Environmental Resources, Aging, Transportation, Health, Welfare, and Community Affairs. Rural local governments, residents, and businesses are at a disadvantage in participating in these programs.

Three Opportunities To Increase Rural Acess To State Programs

- *ensure state programs make sense for rural environments*
- *build upon state programs already working well in rural Pennsylvania*
- *improve access to professional expertise necessary to solve rural problems*

OPPORTUNITY: ***Ensure that state programs make sense for rural environments.***

The disadvantages inherent in sparsely populated areas include: difficulties attracting new business and industry, high cost of providing services for a small population, large numbers of

small governmental units with resultant coordination problems, and reliance on part-time elected officials and volunteers. As state programs generally do not recognize these disadvantages, rural areas do not participate in the programs available to them in proportion to their needs.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Form an Intra-governmental Council for Program Coordination in rural areas.*

Coordination of state programs is particularly critical in rural areas as often one rural program administrator is assigned to a number of different programs. Inconsistent program criteria and conflicting administrative reporting requirements among state agencies present significant barriers for rural areas in using available programs.

The ROOTS Program includes a recommendation that Governor Robert P. Casey form an Intragovernmental Council for Rural Program Coordination under the Office of Rural Affairs. The Council would provide for cabinet-level coordination of state programs as they are administered in rural areas. The primary responsibility of the Council would be to identify and implement mechanisms to improve the utilization of state programs in rural areas through more effective state-level coordination. Initial tasks of the Council would include (1) develop and implement an integrated delivery system for family services in rural areas and, (2) improve coordination and administration of state-funded rural public transportation programs.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Analyze legislation before it becomes law to determine its affect on rural citizens.*

In addition to ensuring that current laws are administered in a way to encourage rural participation, it is important that future legislation makes sense for rural areas. As a part of the ROOTS Program, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania will expand its services to the General Assembly to conduct policy analysis on all major programs which have a potential impact on rural areas. The Center will provide members of the General Assembly with information on any positive or negative impacts of proposed legislation on rural areas and ways in which the proposed legislation could be amended for the betterment of rural citizens.

OPPORTUNITY: *Build upon state programs already working well in rural Pennsylvania.*

A central cornerstone of the ROOTS Program is to build upon opportunities and programs already in place in rural areas before developing new programs. Many state programs are

already working well in rural Pennsylvania. However, in some cases, programs already working well need to be expanded and modified to be even more effective in providing solutions to rural problems.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Raise the current funding cap and expand the current appropriation for the Community Facilities Program.*

One economic development program in particular has a track record of working well in rural areas. The Pennsylvania Community Facilities Program is known as an effective and responsive infrastructure development program for rural areas. Unfortunately, funding for this program is limited and the current funding cap is too restrictive to effectively support rural economic development needs. The ROOTS Program includes proposed legislation to raise the current funding cap and expand the current appropriation for the Community Facilities Program to provide additional funding for rural industrial and business site development.

OPPORTUNITY: *Improve access to professional expertise necessary for solving rural problems.*

A chief disadvantage of rural areas is a reliance on part-time elected officials and volunteers. Town officials are often shoe salesmen or teachers by day and officials by night. While these officials are dedicated to their position and communities, they often do not have the technical expertise to effectively plan, apply for resources and implement strategies to address rural problems. Evidence has shown that those areas with access to professional planners and grantsman have had better success in obtaining needed state assistance and more effectively manage their communities.

While it is not feasible to place a professional planner in every rural town, access of rural officials to professional staff is becoming increasingly important as rural communities struggle with the challenges of economic decline in the west and with explosive growth in the eastern part of the state. Expanding access of rural areas to knowledgeable development professionals will help leverage other state rural development resources as these professionals enable rural areas to more effectively utilize available state programs.

POLICY INITIATIVE: *Improve the utilization of university resources for rural development outreach.*

The many colleges and universities in Pennsylvania offer considerable potential to increase the technical assistance provided to rural communities. Rural development

programs currently offered by higher education institutions are limited in scope and do not begin to meet the need for assistance in rural areas. The impact of university resources devoted to rural development has been diminished by a lack of state-level coordination resulting in substantial duplication of effort among the Commonwealth's colleges and universities.

As a part of the ROOTS Program, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania would identify rural development expertise currently available from colleges and universities in Pennsylvania, areas where additional expertise should be developed, and assess duplication of effort among current state-funded university-based rural development programs. Recommendations to the Pennsylvania General Assembly including funding level and appropriate administration for a coordinated state-wide university-based rural development outreach program would be developed. If appropriate, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania would further seek state appropriations to implement the recommended program.

POLICY INITIATIVE: ***Encourage the establishment of county economic development offices.***

Professional economic development assistance for rural areas is needed both at the local and regional level. Many rural counties lack professionally staffed economic development offices. Counties with professionally staffed economic development offices are more able to develop and implement effective local development strategies. Technical expertise necessary to support counties in economic development planning, financial packaging, export development counseling, human resource development and planning, market analysis, business and industrial recruitment assistance, and mainstreet development is most effectively provided by regional organizations. This initiative would provide matching grants to counties to be used to hire professional staff and pay necessary office overhead for the purpose of coordinating local economic development efforts.

POLICY INITIATIVE: ***Provide financial incentives for Local Development Districts to expand services to rural areas of the Commonwealth.***

Economic development and planning expertise exists within the Commonwealth's Local Development Districts, but isolated rural communities often do not take advantage of available services. These regional organizations tend to focus their efforts on developing industrial opportunities in larger communities within their territories. The ROOTS Program includes financial incentive to encourage Local Development Districts to reach out to rural areas.

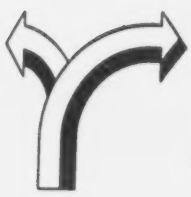
The **ROOTS** Program
Rural **O**pportunities **O**ffer **T**omorrow's **S**uccess

Synopsis

Create a better educated rural workforce by:

- O breaking the cycle of low participation rates for higher education in rural areas;
- O bringing the specialized courses needed for tomorrow's economy to rural schools and businesses through computers and phone lines;
- O expanding the availability of two-year college degree programs in rural areas.

Help rural areas benefit from urban growth by:

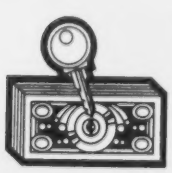


- O developing rural telelinked businesses that serve urban clients;
- O supporting development that will capture dollars in the rural communities where many urban workers live;
- O ending the return of millions of rural housing dollars allocated for Pennsylvania back to the federal government.

Curtail present threats to the rural health care system by:

- O minimizing the loss of rural doctors that will result from the dismantling of the National Health Service Corps and other recent events;
- O ensuring that rural areas do not lose critical community hospitals.

Increase rural access to state programs by:



- O ensuring state programs make sense for rural environments;
- O building upon state programs presently working well in rural Pennsylvania;
- O improving access to professional expertise needed to solve rural problems.